

## **The decoration projects for the Brussels *Cour de Cassation* (1883-1913) Legal imagery on the edge of Symbolism**

### **Abstract**

At the time of its construction the world's largest building, the Brussels *Palais de Justice*, designed by architect Joseph Poelaert, asked for a decorative finish after its inauguration in 1883. This paper focuses on the fascinating meeting of disciplines and the historical transformation embodied by the decoration projects for this building around 1900. The specific decoration projects for both the solemn and the ordinary courtroom of the *Cour de Cassation*, Belgium's highest court, originated at the crossroads of a legal and an artistic world. These two worlds increasingly intermingled and became entangled in the Belgian *fin de siècle*, as illustrated by the career and initiatives of Edmond Picard, a leading lawyer, who founded both the legal *Journal des Tribunaux* and the art journal *L'Art Moderne*, the latter acting as the mouthpiece of the *avant garde* art societies *Les XX* and *La Libre Esthétique*. Furthermore, the decoration of the Brussels *Palais de Justice* took place during an artistic timeframe in which historical wall painting gradually gave way to the allegorical wall painting of the symbolist movement and style. National legitimization as a goal was gradually replaced by a search for didactically conveying universal principles of law and justice. Finally, confronting art criticism, projects and points of view around 1900 in contemporary art and legal journals and government archives with the instructions for court room decorations from 1405 brings to light an analogy which enables us to fundamentally question the intension of legal imagery and court room decorations in the modern age.

### **Bio**

Stefan Huygebaert (°1988 Brugge, Belgium) studied History (UGent, 2006-2007), Art History (UGent, 2007-2011) and Specific Education Degree (KULeuven, 2011-2012). He was an intern at the Mu.Zee Oostende. Since October 2012, he is preparing a PhD thesis at Ghent University with Dirk Heirbaut, Georges Martyn and Bruno De Wever as supervisors, questioning both the national character as well as the continuity and change of the visual language of law & justice in the Southern low countries and Belgium during the long nineteenth century.